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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the planning of information services in South Africa via Peoples Libraries in support of People's Education, i.e., Post-Apartheid education with a humanistic perspective that strives to offer black and white students education with equal levels of quality, and includes Black Studies in the curriculum. People's Libraries are defined as facilities that proactively provide information as well as physical space to assist people in decision making and self-development. It is noted that most libraries that currently fall under that definition are not part of official library and information services. This paper includes a discussion of two potential objectives of People's Libraries: to support labor movements, alternative education programs, and adult education and, in the Post-Apartheid Era, to support and promote reeducation programs on a nationwide scale. It is proposed that services would include storage and dissemination of information in all formats and information referral, and People's Library personnel would be: (1) politically aware, (2) educationalists, (3) managers, (4) organizers, (5) information experts, and (6) willing to perform their jobs for relatively low remuneration or on a voluntary basis. (19 references) (SD)

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# PEOPLE'S LIBRARIES IN SUPPORT OF PEOPLE'S EDUCATION

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# PEOPLE'S LIBRARIES IN SUPPORT OF PEOPLE'S EDUCATION

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Without information support, the implementation of People's Education will be very difficult. Education in a Post-Apartheid SA, and even more specifically People's Education have been addressed at various conferences or workshops, both internally and externally. However, very little, if anything at all, has been written or said about the role of information support services after liberation.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

### 2.1 PEOPLE'S EDUCATION

In a Post-Apartheid society, a drastic change of emphasis regarding education can be expected. The Educational philosophy must re-assess the goals at which education should be directed. Education will have to participate in the broadening of democracy by exposing the people to democratic processes at all levels. Educational planning of syllabi will require collaborative input by the community in order to address new expectations and needs in the educational, economic, cultural and political spheres, as generated by the changed dispensation.

Education will have to prepare students for life-long development in order to cope with the fast developing pace of technology in the post-apartheid society.

People's Education is directed at the broad mass and not just at an elitist student body. Therefore needs-related programmes of education must also include workers and parents. These programmes should be implemented in consultation with grass-roots educational organisations. Programmes of re-training and skills development of teachers will be necessary.

Initially, People's Education, just as Christian National Education, came as reaction to oppression. In the case of People's Education, it was a reaction against years of wasteful, apartheid gutter education. Black Education, with more than 80% of the teachers not fully qualified, (Bot and Schlemmer : 1987, 8) used as it's teaching method rote learning and had as its goal the passing of exams. Its content was based on syllabi that were designed by Whites and it deprived, and is still depriving, many Blacks of learning about their own heritage.

People's Education with its person centred, humanistic approach to education creates the structures for active involvement and participation in education by all parties involved in the educational process.

This active involvement implies a methodological break from traditional learning and teaching approaches such as rote learning and "chalk and talk". New methods that will be utilised include, inter alia, the following: the utilisation of laboratories, workshops, self study in libraries, discussions and presentation of assignments. The active involvement in the educational process also pre-supposes an evaluation of whatever is being learned.

People's Education involves a critical and creative analysis of teaching and learning methods. Consequently, People's Education leads to both developing and generating knowledge as well as giving insight into what is being learned and interrogates methodology.

Education and politics cannot be separated. Education is a basic human need and as such the state has a responsibility to meet this need. Consequently the political bias of the state may well be reflected in its educational programmes. In the present situation, where the majority of the population has been excluded from normal political practices, no meaningful contribution can be made by it to the educational process. This situation underlies the widespread rejection of Black Education by its recipients.

This rejection culminated in the turbulent 1976 riots and has been with us ever since.

People's Education will have to prepare the voteless masses, (initially) for, and later, after Liberation, the newly enfranchised for democratic practices.

In the present phase, People's Education should be directed at preparing the People for democracy by creating political awareness through programmes that will lead to greater conscientisation to the democratic struggle.

## 2.2 PEOPLE'S LIBRARIES

People's Libraries can be broadly defined as those facilities that pro-actively provide information as well as the physical space to assist people in their decision-making and consequently self development. People's Libraries may range from a room with basic furniture and stock, (even as basic as a private collection in a private home) to a modern complex fitted with state of the art technology and employing specialist staff who disseminate the information and give guidance to users.

The short and medium term emphasis of People's Libraries will be primarily educational support as directed by the needs of the people.

People's Libraries should be seen as being in process. At this stage, most libraries that fall under the above delineation are not part of the official Library and Information Services. As we enter the Post-Apartheid Era, more libraries will be supportive to the People's needs. Eventually all Library and Information Services will be based on the real needs of the People and not just related to one section of the population.

When one studies a model for a community library / People's Library the present dearth of services is reflective of the general educational situation in the country. People's Libraries serve the Black population and as such often have very limited funds and consequently lack facilities. Their main strength at this stage lies in their idealistic and dedicated staff.

There are certain basic spaces and/or services that should be provided for:

* The basic storage of books.
* As much study space as possible.
* Newspaper reading tables.
* Bulletin boards.
* Audio-visual carrels / tables.
* Seminar / meeting rooms (that can double-up as study space).
* Production - may be very basic - eg. photocopying, basic graphics, etc.

The determining factor is finance. As money becomes available, bigger areas, as determined by needs, may be commissioned and more specialised staff could be appointed. Important staffing components would be an educationalist and media specialist if they could be afforded.

People's Libraries are with us. There has been a proliferation of such community-based centres over the last few years. They have developed spontaneously in all the major centres and are wholly needs-directed. The reason for this development is obvious. The "traditional" Library and Information Services, as a rule, are not addressing the needs of the People and "official" libraries are lacking in the Black areas: for example, Umlazi, one of the biggest townships in South Africa, has no public library.

## 3. THE POTENTIAL OF PEOPLE'S LIBRARIES IN SUPPORT OF PEOPLE'S EDUCATION

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Initially, People's Libraries will play mostly a non-formal educational role, both in terms of services and facilities as long as the disparity in expenditure under the racist regime that controls development, still prevails. The content is also influenced because of restrictive measures and state censorship.

In this first stage of support to People's Education during the present period of transition, a high premium is placed on the non-formal section.

The non-formal sector in our context will include labour movements, alternative schools and alternative programmes in an attempt to neutralise, or supplement existing formal educational programmes and adult education.

The formal education, on a pre-tertiary level at least, is firmly ensnared in the racist web of the Nationalist government. To make any headway in this sphere, a strategy of conscientisation of educationalists, including teachers, teacher-librarians / or principals to introduce aspects of People's Education into the places of learning, will be necessary. (This conscientisation can be facilitated by creating an awareness in teachers' organisations, specialist teacher- librarian's working groups and the publishing of articles in relevant journals). In other words, change should be motived, initiated and supported by enlightened, innovated educators.

On the tertiary level, there is greater opportunity to implement certain aspects of People's Education. The most striking example is, of course, the University of the Western Cape. The vast potential of establishing a truly People's Library there, however, still has to be developed.

The second phase of support of People's Libraries for People's Education will come in the Post-Apartheid Era. Over and above the educational support, the re-educative function will feature strongly. The nation will have to be re-aligned to political normalisation and nation-wide re-educative programmes will have to be introduced.

During this phase the function of the traditional (now present) community library will be taken over by the Public Library Services (in most instances). Each educational institution, from Primary School to University or Technikon, will have a People's Library with all the relevant staff, physical facilities as well as content and relevancy.

However, and in the short and medium term, we should direct our effort to implementing the potential of People's Libraries in People's Education in this Transitional Period.

People's Education is a dynamic process and its educational and socio-political potential will become greater as more people, at all levels are involved with its implementation.

## 3.2 FUNCTIONS OF PEOPLE'S LIBRARIES (In the Short and Medium Term)

The function of the People's Library is manifested by the informational support provided to its community. In the first phase of development the potential of the People's Library will be related to the needs of the direct community, but will expand the services much wider in a mutually beneficial relationship in the future.

The services would include the storage of relevant information in all formats. It is interesting to note that the integration of non-traditional formats of information transfer in collections has a very high priority in existing People's Libraries / Community Information Centres, when compared to traditional library models.

Much relevant information is available only in non-traditional formats and this makes special demands on the storage and retrieval of material. Examples are conference reports, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, newspaper articles, periodicals and of course the proliferation of various audio-visual formats.

The People's Library also has an information dissemination function and often has to act as a referral agent. It is therefore imperative to have dedicated and informed staff to man such facilities. Staffing therefore poses real problem. For example, a local community information centre took almost a year to appoint the right person.

The staffing aspect is very delicate. It is expected of the person that runs a community information centre to be socio-politically aware, to be an educationalist, as well as an educational technologist, a manager, an organiser, an information expert, - and to do all this work for a relatively low remuneration, or often on a voluntary or part-time basis.

The People's Library also has a pro-active function by anticipating information needs and meeting them with displays, leaflets, a newsletter or referral.

The People's Library has an educational function in so far that it can supply reading or study space for users, as well as areas where workshops, discussions or audio-visual material can be accommodated.

This educational function also has an outreach component that is also pro-active. If the People's Library does not have the educational expertise to meet this function, it should have contact with grass-root educational organisations to offer workshops, in-service courses, etc.

## 3.3 IMPLEMENTATION IN VARIOUS FIELDS

The marketing function of the above philosophy will be the responsibility of exponents of People's Education as well as information workers.

The first step for progressive Information workers is to organise themselves in a national association. Only then can the next step be introduced to accomplish maximum effectiveness with marketing strategies: namely liaison on a more formally structured and co-ordinated basis with workers in the alternative supplementary educational fields. Through a combination of expertise in the two fields, namely People's Education and People's Libraries, the potential of both People's Libraries and People's Education will be maximised.

## 3.4 THE NON-FORMAL SECTOR

Since the Second World War there has been an international shift from liberal or individualistic education to education that addresses the society's needs.

Education is a fundamental need and is therefore shaped by politics as the education policy reflects the national aspirations, options and conception of the future.

The formal education system in the RSA is being questioned, because of its content, ideology and methodology. Consequently, the non-formal sector has taken on itself the supplementing of educational programmes in various fields.

### 3.4.1 Alternative Schools

These private schools such as the Alternative Christian Education (ACE) and New Era Trust (NEST) schools, although exclusive, are relatively free to experiment with the introduction of alternative and progressive curricula. They can also introduce the informational support necessary to

sustain these programmes. In most cases, however, these libraries are not open to the general community.

3.4.2 Alternative or Supplementary Programmes

These programmes include upgrading of teachers, librarians, literacy programmes, science, adult education, communication and worker education programmes. Alternative programmes are offered by church organisations, labour movements, Operation UPGRADE, READ, TOPS, the Molteno project and at the initiative of some universities. Many of these programmes are funded corporately, by church organisations or even through overseas funding.

People's Libraries, having been identified in the relevant communities, must make contact with the facilitators of these programmes and liaise closely with regards to content and methodology in order to assist with the implementation. The importance of a unified organised association able to negotiate on a national basis with these organisations and institutions, is obvious.

Although these efforts are sometimes unco-ordinated, a national association could organise and direct support to these programmes. Consequently, this support could lead to limited co-ordination and better communication between the proponents of these programmes.

3.4.3 Universities

The National Educational Crisis Committee (NECC) believes that universities cannot remain isolated from the communities they serve. In a situation where black schooling is in a shambles, its position is that universities - or at least progressive academics within them - should work with the communities beyond university walls. This means not working for but working with communities.

Presently, these communities want Bantu Education scrapped and replaced with a non-racial democratic People's Education. The NECC, together with trade union federations like COSATU, teachers' associations like the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA), the African Teachers' Association, the Western Cape Teachers' Union (WECTU), and others, are working together in formulating curricula for a new South Africa, especially in subjects such as History and English. Research units have been set up with certain faculties of symphathetic universities, and proper checks and participation have been assured to safeguard community interests. In this way, universities can begin to take a cue from affected communities without adopting the usual condescending attitudes that cloud the universities' role with a "scientific" aura. (Molobi, 1988: 158).

Most of the South African English medium universities as well as the University of the Western Cape, have community outreach programmes or specialist units / institutes to address broader educational problems or strategies. Many of these institutes have their own specialist information centres, set apart from the traditional institutional library services. These Resource Centres fit better into the definition of People's Libraries as they are more needs- or community-directed.

Unfortunately, even at these universities, most of the trained professional librarians, even at management level, are not familiar with the concepts of People's Education and the real needs of the People, either due to personal prejudice or simply because of their irrelevant training, background and experience which has been directed at White, First World conditions as reflected in the Apartheid Society.

Again, an organised association could share expertise between trained professionals and negotiate the inclusion of relevant material in broader collections.

### 3.4.4 Technikons and Colleges

Natal Technikon and the Johannesburg College of Education are examples of institutions that have included components of People's Education in their Higher Teachers' Diploma programmes.

Technikon Mangosuthu at Umlazi, Durban has a fully integrated Resource Centre which has a needs-directed philosophy. The Resource Centre is managed on democratic principles with representation by the students in the decision and policy-making process. Its facilities are open to any Teacher or Tertiary student and it has a twenty-four hour study facility that is meeting the need of many township students who simply require a space to study.

The Resource Centre, established mostly through corporate fundings (a four and a half million grant from Anglo American / De Beers), has direct links with a number of community organisations and its facilities are in constant demand for workshops, meetings and viewings of audio-visual materials.

The Peninsula Technikon has also taken the need for alternative spaces into consideration in designing its library.

### 3.4.5 Teacher Support

The teacher's role has changed. Traditionally, he/she was regarded as a source of knowledge; he/she had to guide his/her students, often with only one objective in mind, the passing of examinations. With the modern teacher, especially in the context of People's Education, the accent shifts. The teacher is regarded as a manager in the teaching / learning situation. This shift has come about because of the information explosion and the resultant knowledge specialisation. The teacher needs informational support and therefore information support services have a role to play.

The traditional educational library services are definitely not equipped to fully support the teacher in the context of People's Education.

People's Libraries, operating on a community level or attached to educational institutes could make contact with teachers' associations / unions and offer their services.

Ideally, teachers' centres, with fully equipped model libraries, meeting spaces, and a production area should provide this service, but sponsoring such centres through traditional channels would be impossible at this stage.

### 3.4.6 Trade Union Support

People's Education is directed at the broad mass and not just at an elitist student body. Therefore needs-related programmes of education must also include the workers. For example, COSATU has a workers' education programme in operation. People's Libraries can act as referral agencies, only if there is awareness among Information Workers of the information developments in the wider community, including the worker community.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Without People's Libraries being organised into some form of association, their potential to support People's Education will be limited.

Forums exist in Cape Town and Durban and the Johannesburg group is in the process of organising a similar forum in the Transvaal. The time is ripe to form a co-ordinating body. Many progressive librarians that have disassociated themselves from the South African Institute for Library and Information Science (SAILIS) because of its racist policies in the past, would be prepared to offer their expertise in such an organisation.

There is an umbrella organisation of Information Workers operating in our region, namely The Standing Conference of Eastern, Central, and Southern African Librarians (SCECSAL). SCECSAL has been involved in Developmental Librarianship for the last fifteen years and has addressed many of the problems that we are struggling with at the present.

A unified Progressive Association would be able to make contact with SCECSAL or with South African exiles. This contact would be to the benefit of all involved. Expertise on a wide front would be pooled and could be directed to planning Library and Information Services in a Post-Apartheid South Africa.

In conclusion, to quote from John Naisbitt: "The new source of power is not money in the hands of few, but information in the hands of many."

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